

Field Report

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park

■ 1.0 Summary

The Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park is located in the city of Fredericksburg, and adjacent areas of Stafford, Spotsylvania, Orange, and Caroline Counties, Virginia. The Fredericksburg area is located approximately midway between Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia. The park was originally established as the “Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park” by an Act of Congress on February 14, 1927. The stated purpose of the Act was to “...establish a national military park at and near Fredericksburg, Virginia, and to mark and preserve historical points connected with the battles of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House, Wilderness, and Chancellorsville, including Salem Church, Virginia.” The park encompasses an area of approximately 9,000 acres, and is generally considered the largest military park in the world. The park includes portions of the land on which the Civil War battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House were fought, and also includes the historic structures of Chatham, Ellwood, Salem Church, and the “Stonewall” Jackson Shrine. The park has been authorized to purchase approximately 2,000 acres of additional land around the periphery of the current park area.

Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) appear to have a significant potential for addressing a number of the transportation and resource conservation issues currently facing the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. ATS appears to offer ways in which to provide improved internal park circulation options for visitors. Additionally, ATS has the potential to link the various park units together as part of the NPS efforts to interpret the significance of these battlefields while reducing on-site parking demands.

At the same time, there are a number of more broadly based regional transportation and development issues facing the park that are beyond the abilities of ATS to resolve. Not only is continuing suburban residential, commercial and industrial development beginning to impinge on the NPS properties, but increasing traffic volumes generated by this development and proposed highway improvements such as the Fredericksburg Outer Connector have the potential to both impact park properties and degrade the visitor experience. These issues appear to be in need of immediate attention.

The ATS potentials identified for this NPS site include the following:

- Within each of the park’s four major units (the Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse Battlefields), a short-term (three to five

years) potential appears to exist for an internal tram-type service with the on-board NPS interpretative narration. The existing privately owned and operated “Trolley Tours of Fredericksburg” may have the potential to address some of these needs. The priorities for the consideration of such ATS services appear to be as follows: 1) Fredericksburg, 2) Chancellorsville, 3) Wilderness, 4) Spotsylvania Court House. Any such services should be developed in coordination with other state and local initiatives for improved tourism management in the region.

- A mid- to long-range (five to 10 years) ATS potential would be the creation of a loop service to interconnect all of the major park units. A routing which linked, in order, the Fredericksburg, Salem Church, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Battlefields, and the Stonewall Jackson Shrine could provide visitors with a very comprehensive overview of the area. A small bus-type vehicle that allows for on-board interpretative narration to be provided would appear to be best suited for this potential service.
- A long-range (20 years or more) ATS potential might involve the use of an unfinished Civil War era railroad trace to provide an exclusive transit linkage between the Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Wilderness Battlefields. This abandoned right-of-way traverses both park and privately owned properties along a corridor that generally parallels State Route 3 from the city of Fredericksburg to the west. Any such proposal would have to be developed within a broader regional tourism management plan.

■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

The Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park is located in the city of Fredericksburg, and adjacent areas of Stafford, Spotsylvania, Orange, and Caroline Counties, Virginia. The Fredericksburg area is located approximately midway between Washington, DC and Richmond, Virginia.

2.2 Administration and Classification

The Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park is a multi-unit site administered by the National Park Service.

2.3 Physical Description

The Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park encompasses an area of approximately 9,000 acres, and is generally considered the largest military park in the world. The park includes portions of the land on which the Civil War battles of

Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House were fought. The park also includes the historic structures of Chatham, Ellwood, Salem Church, and the “Stonewall” Jackson Shrine. The park has been authorized to purchase approximately 2,000 acres of additional land around the periphery of the current park area.

The park’s headquarters and administrative offices are housed in Chatham, a Georgian plantation house dating from 1768. This location is open daily and contains a number of exhibits. The Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center is located in the city of Fredericksburg adjacent to the Fredericksburg National Cemetery. The Fredericksburg Visitor Center is open daily with exhibits and a slide program. It also includes an extensive bookstore specializing in the Civil War. A second NPS visitor center is located at the Chancellorsville Battlefield. This facility is also open daily and has a slide program and a small bookstore. The NPS historians are available at both locations to answer questions.

The Wilderness Exhibit Shelter and the Spotsylvania Court House Exhibit Shelter are manned by the NPS Historians daily during the summer and on weekends in the spring and fall. These facilities are not manned during the winter months. The “Stonewall” Jackson Shrine where Confederate Lt. General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson died contains exhibits and is manned by a NPS Historian on a daily basis during the summer, from Friday – Tuesday in the spring and fall, and on Saturday – Monday in the winter. Salem Church and Ellwood contain exhibits and are open on a seasonal basis. There are a number of outdoor exhibits at the various battlefield sites, since the park is viewed as an “outdoor classroom” to allow for study of the battles.

2.4 Mission and Goals of the National Military Park

The park was originally established as the “Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park” by an Act of Congress on February 14, 1927. The stated purpose of the Act was to “...establish a national military park at and near Fredericksburg, Virginia, and to mark and preserve historical points connected with the battles of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House, Wilderness, and Chancellorsville, including Salem Church, Virginia.” The original administration of the park was the responsibility of the War Department (now the Department of Defense). Jurisdiction was transferred to the NPS on August 10, 1933.

As described in the current General Management Plan (1986), the Park Management Objectives are as follows:

“Commemorate the Civil War battles of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House, Wilderness, and Chancellorsville; mark and preserve for historical purposes the breastworks, earthworks, gun emplacements, walls, or other defenses or shelters used by the armies in these battles; make the historical points accessible to the public and to students of the battles; facilitate public enjoyment and understanding of the historic events and people connected with the historic sites and historic scenes within the park; and encourage use of adjacent lands, which form the setting for the preserved historic features, in

ways that complement the park story without intruding on the historic atmosphere of the park.”

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

Annual visitation has fluctuated in recent years, from a high of 2,120,456 persons in 1995 to 1,587,821 in 1998. Visitation levels in the January – June period of 1999 are similar to those observed in recent years. The highest visitation, as measured by building visits, occurs between the months of April and October, with the lowest visitation during the December – February time period. Approximately 35,000 persons visited Chatham, about 300,000 persons stopped at the Fredericksburg Visitors Center, and approximately 180,000 persons stopped at the Chancellorsville Visitors Center. During 1998, visits to the park averaged approximately 132,320 persons per month, ranging from a low of 93,482 persons in November to a high of 177,659 persons in June.

A survey of park visitors in 1994 determined that the average size of a visiting group was 2.52 persons, with each group spending approximately 1.37 days in the Fredericksburg area. Average daily expenditures by each group were estimated to be approximately \$129.00. Approximately 55 percent of visitors reside in the South Atlantic or Mid-Atlantic regions of the country, with 26 percent of visitors from the Commonwealth of Virginia alone. The next two largest states for visitor residence location were Pennsylvania (seven percent) and California (seven percent). Only about four percent of total visitation is from outside of the United States.

The visitor survey results indicate that this is not a destination park. Rather, Fredericksburg is generally only one stop on a multi-location tour of other Civil War battlefields and historic sites (Washington, DC; Williamsburg; Charlottesville, etc.) in the region. Typical visitors spend approximately two hours each at the Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville Battlefields, about 1.5 hours at Spotsylvania Court House, one hour at Chatham, and about one hour at the Wilderness Battlefield.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The various units of the park are currently experiencing a variety of transportation issues and concerns. Parking demand at the Fredericksburg Visitors Center frequently exceeds the capacity of the existing 50 space parking area. As recommended in the current GMP, the NPS is planning to acquire an adjacent parcel of land to allow for the replacement of the existing parking area with a 100 space lot to better accommodate peak demands. At the “Sunken Road” area of the Fredericksburg Battlefield, the NPS plans to remove the existing pavement and reconfigure this street to its condition at the time of the battle. The recent completion of the Virginia Route 3 Bypass (Blue and Grey Parkway) has resulted in a substantial reduction of traffic along this important element of the Battlefield’s internal

roadway system. This street segment is also used by the local private historic trolley service.

Roadway Issues

The Virginia Department of Transportation is investigating alternatives to improve the portion of Lafayette Boulevard (U.S. Route 1 Business) between its intersection with the Blue and Grey Parkway and U.S. Route 1 (Jefferson Davis Highway). Several of these improvement options have the potential to impact the existing intersection of Lee Drive North (an NPS roadway) with Lafayette Boulevard. This intersection is itself historic, by virtue of the park roadway constructed in the early 1930s, and adjoins the NPS lands. The NPS is working with VDOT staff to resolve this issue.

Perhaps the most significant transportation issues affecting the park involve VDOT plans for improvements to State Route 3 west of I-95 and a proposed western bypass of the city of Fredericksburg known locally as the “Outer Connector.” These interrelated projects are viewed by the NPS as having the potential for significant negative impacts upon the park.

Over the past decade, a significant amount of residential and commercial development has taken place along the area of State Route 3 from the I-95 interchange west towards the Chancellorsville and Wilderness Battlefields. Indeed, this development has now totally surrounded Salem Church, one the park’s units. Virginia State Route 3 (also known locally as Plank Road) has been a major east-west thoroughfare for over 150 years, and traverses both the Chancellorsville and Wilderness Battlefields. Current average daily traffic volumes on the portion of Route 3 just east of Chancellorsville Battlefield is approximately 23,000 vehicles per day (Source: VDOT Average Daily Traffic Volumes on Interstate, Arterial and Primary Routes, 1996).

When Route 3 was widened from two to four lanes in the late 1960s, the NPS granted VDOT an easement to use NPS property for this widening. The ownership of the land still resides with the NPS. Recently, the Virginia DOT installed a traffic signal at the intersection of Route 3 and Route 610 (Elys Ford Road/Old Plank Road). This road junction is the site of the now removed Chancellorsville Inn, a major focal point of the battle. VDOT has now proposed to widen the approaches to this intersection as a safety and capacity enhancement action. The NPS is opposed to this project due to its impact upon NPS property.

As development continues westward along Route 3, the NPS is becoming increasingly concerned about the potential for further widening to Route 3 and associated impacts to NPS properties. There has been some initial interest expressed by local officials and the park staff for the concept of relocating Route 3 to the north of the Wilderness and Chancellorsville Battlefields. However, VDOT has no plans at this time to formally investigate this proposal.

The proposed Outer Connector is envisioned by VDOT as a multilane, median-divided, controlled access highway on new location. It would connect I-95 from a point north of the existing I-95/U.S. Route 17 interchange in Stafford County with Route 3 some distance west of the I-95/Route 3 interchange in Spotsylvania County. A companion study is investigating an extension of this proposed new route to the east of I-95. As described on

the VDOT Web site, the status of the Outer Connector project (as of August 19, 1999) is as follows:

“On February 19, 1998, by a vote of 13 to one, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) selected Corridor 1, the western most corridor as the selected corridor for this project. This selection was made based on input from the public, state and federal resource and regulatory agencies, and local officials on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the November 1997 Location Public Hearings.

“On June 9, 1998, the Federal Highway Administration notified the Virginia Department of Transportation that a supplement to the DEIS would be needed before the Department could finalize their environmental review of the Outer Connector. Based on comments from the National Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Highway Administration asked that the Department provide additional information on potential historic properties associated with Civil War battlefields and the Rappahannock River’s recreational resources within the Outer Connector study area. For this reason, the Department is currently conducting additional data collection and analyses to supplement the information contained in the DEIS. Field data collection in the study area is expected to continue through 1999.

“The major SDEIS work to be conducted includes:

- A reevaluation of the Rappahannock River and associated recreation resources;
- A detailed evaluation of four new segments of Corridor 1 that would either avoid or minimize Corridor 1’s involvement with historic properties. These new segments are referred to as Corridor 1A, Corridor 1B, Corridor 4A, and Corridor 4B;
- A survey of all corridors for the small whorled pogonia; and
- A revision of the traffic analysis, based on updated local and regional planning information within the study area.

“During this effort, the Department will also update other information (secondary and cumulative impacts, land use impacts, and relocation impacts) because considerable new development has occurred since the initiation of the DEIS. This information will be documented in a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS).” (Source: VDOT Web site – www.vdot.state.us/project/outerx.html.)

The NPS concerns about the proposed Outer Connector involve both the potential for direct and indirect impacts upon park properties, and the likelihood of increased development (and associated increases in traffic through the park) along the portion of Route 3 from the proposed Outer Connector interchange to the east towards Fredericksburg. The NPS staff also expressed the view that, if the Outer Connector were

to be built, it should not terminate at Route 3, but should rather be extended further to the south and east to rejoin I-95 south of Fredericksburg. At the same time, the potential for this Fredericksburg Outer Connector to ultimately become the southern segment of the proposed Western Washington Transportation Corridor is also of concern to park staff.

Somewhat similar, but less immediate, concerns relate to the potential for improvements to other public roads that traverse the Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Courthouse Battlefields. These include State Route 20 (Constitution Highway), Route 610 (Old Plant Road), Route 613 (Brock Road), and Route 621 (Orange Plank Road). As residential development continues to take place along the Route 3 corridor and its intersecting secondary roads, requests from new residents for improvements to these roadways are becoming more frequent.

In an effort to better address these issues and concerns, the NPS staff at Fredericksburg and representatives of the Fredericksburg District and Richmond Central Offices of the Virginia Department of Transportation have initiated a dialogue to define an improved planning process. This would involve the more active involvement of the NPS staff in the transportation and community planning process in the Fredericksburg area administered by the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO). At the same time, VDOT and other local agencies would become more involved with the GMP process for the park. This effort to define an improved planning process was initiated in the summer of 1999 and is anticipated to be completed in the spring of 2000. It is envisioned that this more proactive and integrated process can be employed as a “model” for interaction between the NPS and VDOT throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Visitor Tours

The NPS staff commented that the current self-guided visitor tours are not able to provide the best possible visitor experience. These take the form of using either the NPS provided brochures or narrated cassette tapes to tour the battlefields using some of the minor public and the NPS roads within the boundaries of the various park units. The park is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 30 miles of public access park roads. The NPS staff expressed a preference for a more formalized tour with on-board NPS ranger narrators/interpreters, perhaps using small tram-type vehicles.

In discussions with local staff of the VDOT Fredericksburg District Office and city of Fredericksburg representatives, the need for improved linkages between the NPS Fredericksburg Visitor Center and the city’s historic district was noted.

Regional Transit System

The Fredericksburg area has a variety of existing transportation services that appear to have the potential to provide expanded ATS service to the park and its environs. In December of 1996, the Fredericksburg Regional Transit System (FRED) began operations. This local public transit system provides fixed-route, fixed-schedule bus service over a network of six routes Monday through Friday between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. Route deviation service is provided for disabled riders on a 24-hour advance reservation basis. Cash fares are \$0.25 per trip, with an unlimited ride monthly pass sold

for \$10.00. Employees of MediCorp Health System and students, faculty and staff of Mary Washington College ride free with proper identification. The fixed-route/fixed-schedule service operates using a three site, timed-transfer system. Formally designated route to route transfer opportunities are provided at FRED Central (U.S. Route 1 at Stafford Avenue), Spotsylvania Mall along State Route 3 just west of I-95, and at the Four Mile Fork/CVS shopping center (U.S. Route 1 at State Route 208).

Several of the existing FRED routes service units of the park. Specifically, FRED Route 3 (Lafayette Boulevard/Old Mill Park) passes by the Fredericksburg Visitors Center, and Routes 2 (Four Mile Fork/Downtown) and 4 (Mayfield/Fall Hill Avenue) operate through Downtown Fredericksburg within one-half mile of the Fredericksburg Visitors Center. FRED Route 5 (Four Mile Fork/Spotsylvania Mall) passes by Old Salem Church, while Route 6 (Germanna/Spotsylvania Courthouse) passes by the terminus of the one-way NPS driving tour route through the Spotsylvania Court House Battlefield.

In addition to farebox revenues and federal, state, and local governmental support, approximately 30 percent of the total funding for the FRED system is provided directly by local businesses. These supporters include: MediCorp Health System, Mary Washington College, and Ukrop's grocery store chain. Each of these businesses contributes approximately \$25,000 per year to the system. Since its initiation, the system has experienced steady ridership growth. From 93,000 passengers per year in 1997, ridership increased to 112,000 annual passengers in 1998. Current ridership (summer 1999) is reported by FRED staff to be approximately 600 passengers per day. This would be equivalent to an annual ridership level of approximately 150,000 passengers. Current operating costs are budgeted at \$35.00 per vehicle hour of service.

As a result of the positive ridership response that has been observed to date, the potential for service expansions into additional areas of Caroline, Stafford, and King George Counties are being considered by FRED. The FRED staff see a definite need for expanded public transit service in the Fredericksburg region, with this service continuing to be operated in the form of a public/private partnership. An interest was expressed by FRED staff in discussing ways in which the service might be able to provide improved service to the NPS units in the area. One immediately apparent potential might be the use of FRED buses on Saturdays and Sundays to provide access to and from the park units when the regular routes are not being operated.

Trolley Tours of Fredericksburg

In addition to this existing public transportation service, a privately owned and operated company – Trolley Tours of Fredericksburg – has operated a tour route through the city since 1994. This service operates under a renewable franchise agreement with the city of Fredericksburg. The current tour includes a portion of the Fredericksburg Battlefield and the NPS Fredericksburg Visitor Center. The company owns and operates two replica trolley body on bus chassis-type vehicles manufactured by the Boyertown Trolley Company. The seated capacities of these vehicles are 26 and 32 passengers. Typically, only one of these vehicles is operated on a daily basis, with the second vehicle reserved for special events. A fare of \$10.00 per adult and \$5.00 for children between the ages of five and 18 is charged for the approximately 75-minute tour.

Ridership on this service has remained relatively constant in recent years at approximately 10,000 passengers annually. During the peak visitation season of June – October, two tours are operated during both the morning and afternoon periods, seven days per week. During the months of April, May, and November only a single morning and afternoon tour is operated, again seven days per week. During December, service is operated only on Saturdays and Sundays. No tours are operated during the January – March time period. All tours are operated with a private on-board tour guide/narrator.

The trolley vehicles are available for rental by the general public at a cost of \$75.00 per hour, with a minimum charge of \$150.00. A discounted rate of \$55.00 per hour is charged for community groups. In discussions with the owner/operator of the trolley service, a desire was expressed for expanded cooperation with the NPS. It was noted that an effort several years ago to provide an expanded tour route including several of the battlefield areas west of the city had not been successful. This lack of success was attributed to a lack of cooperation on the part of the then NPS staff in allowing adequate publicity to be provided. However, in spite of these past problems, the operator appears to be open to discussions with the NPS on the provision of a more comprehensive/multi-site tour route.

3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The Fredericksburg area is heavily dependent upon the tourism industry. It is estimated that during 1998 alone, approximately 645,000 persons visited the area, with about 40 percent of this total visiting the NPS units. A 1997 Virginia Tourism Corporation survey of visitors determined that approximately 80 percent of the total visitors to the Fredericksburg area remained in the area for one night or more. The average expenditure per visitor to the area was estimated to be approximately \$151 per day. Applying this average daily expenditure rate of \$151 per day to the estimated 645,000 annual visitors results in an estimated annual direct expenditure by area visitors of approximately \$97.4 million.

At the same time, the community continues to experience permanent population and employment growth as well. Between 1970 and 1990, the total resident population of the city of Fredericksburg and adjacent counties increased from 77,425 to 170,410 persons, or about a 120.1 percent increase. Over the period from 1990 to 2010, the population of the region is expected to continue to increase, to a total of approximately 245,400 persons by 2010. This would represent a change of about 44 percent. Population growth over the past decade has been relatively constant at approximately four percent per year.

By the fall of 1998, total employment in the region had increased to approximately 70,740 persons. Total taxable sales in 1998 for the Fredericksburg area were estimated to be approximately \$1.78 billion.

Clearly, this is a growing region that could benefit from expanded levels of public transportation services.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The preservation of the lands upon which the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Spotsylvania Court House, and the Wilderness were fought is one of the fundamental management objectives of the NPS at this location. This includes both the historic sites and historic scenes within the park itself, as well as the adjacent lands that form the viewshed for the battlefields.

As the Fredericksburg area continues to grow, increasing pressures on the NPS properties are foreseen with the development of currently wooded and agricultural lands as residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. At the same time, efforts by VDOT to provide improved transportation facilities to accommodate increased local and regional travel demands have the potential to impact park properties.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Given the nature of this facility, recreational activities within the park are generally limited to biking, hiking, and jogging. While a limited number of picnic areas are provided, other more active-type recreational facilities are not. The park's GMP proposes the continuation of this orientation.

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 Unit Plans

The current GMP for the park was formally adopted on August 28, 1986. There are no plans to update this document in the immediate future.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

The park is beginning to develop a more formalized working relationship with the surrounding communities and the Commonwealth of Virginia. The local NPS staff and the representatives of the Transportation Planning Division in VDOT's Central Office are currently engaged in the process of defining a better information dissemination process to prevent past conflicts from taking place.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need

5.1 Magnitude of Need

ATS appears to have a significant potential for addressing a number of the transportation and resource conservation issues currently facing the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. ATS appears to offer ways in which to provide improved internal park circulation options for visitors. Additionally, ATS has the potential to link the various park units together as part of the NPS efforts to interpret the significance of these battlefields while reducing on-site parking demands.

At the same time, there are a number of more broadly based regional transportation and development issues facing the park that are beyond the abilities of ATS to resolve. Not only is continuing suburban residential, commercial and industrial development beginning to impinge on the NPS properties, but increasing traffic volumes generated by this development and proposed highway improvements such as the Fredericksburg Outer Connector have the potential to both impact park properties and degrade the visitor experience. These issues appear to be in need of immediate attention.

5.2 Feasible Alternatives

- Within each of the park's four major units (the Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse Battlefields), a short-term (three to five years) potential appears to exist for an internal tram-type service with the on-board NPS interpretative narration. The existing privately owned and operated "Trolley Tours of Fredericksburg" may have the potential to address some of these needs. The priorities for the consideration of such ATS services appear to be as follows: 1) Fredericksburg, 2) Chancellorsville, 3) Wilderness, 4) Spotsylvania Court House. Any such services should be developed in coordination with other state and local initiatives for improved tourism management in the region.
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■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed:

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